

Socialist Worker

CORK SPECIAL

Which way for the campaign?

Fight Service Charges

SERVICE charges are a form of double taxation which hits workers and the unemployed hardest. Everyone knows this. Yet Fianna Fail, the largest right-wing party in this state, tells us—and the other right-wing parties tell us—it is the only way to fund essential local services.

This is nonsense. It is not whether there is money available—either centrally or locally—that determines the issue, but the priorities of the Right. And those are the priorities of the South's ruling class—not ours.

Their priorities mean, in practice, that there isn't a problem in giving Judge Tom O'Higgins, an ex-Blueshirt, a £60,000 golden handshake under a recent deal with the judiciary. Or there isn't ever a problem forking out millions for "security" along the border. Nor giving the South's bosses club, the Irish Management Institute, a profit-making body, £250,000 stipend every year.

Obviously the amount of money available plays only a small role in these decisions. Yet if it is the case that more money is needed, and City Hall tells us that this is so, why not tax the rich rather than bleed more out of workers?

For the Irish rich have it easy. Irish business enjoys the least controls, the lowest rates of corporate taxation and one of the best grants schemes in Western Europe. 80 per cent of all taxes in this state are paid by the PAYE sector. It is about time the rich started to pay.

Service charges represent double taxation, and are a tax which penalises workers and the unemployed.

But they are not inevitable and they can be beaten. The situations in Dublin and Waterford prove this.

A mass campaign, active in the unions and the communities, can focus the anger and beat the service charges.

MASS ACTION THE KEY

THE JAILING of Service Charges protestors marks yet another attack by Fianna Fail on working class people in this country. Yet groups of organised workers

have already shown that these attacks can be resisted.

■ The plumbers union in Cork Corporation has taken a decision not to disconnect the water supply of non-payers.

■ At the upcoming conference of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, a proposal to instruct members of the IMPACT union not to process Service Charge bills is up for debate.

Action of this nature has the potential to stop the service charges in its tracks. For this reason, it is important that all anti-Rates activists who are involved in the trade union movement, discuss the issue and put forward motions against the charges at their Section, Branch or Trades Council meetings.

Workers in Waterford have already shown how organised resistance to water rates can leave the authorities powerless. When Waterford Corporation called in scabs to disconnect the water supply of a non-payer, hundreds of workers marched to the house and prevented the disconnection from taking place.

Waterford Trades Council passed a motion calling for strikes in the event of the jailing of non-payers. Following the protests the Corporation backed off. The lessons of the Waterford campaign along with the poll tax campaign in Britain, are that active resistance by working class people in the community and unions can put paid to unjust taxes!

THE focus of the campaign against Service Charges centres around non-payment. It has also concerned itself with the forthcoming local government elections. The idea is that electing councillors, predominantly from Labour and the Workers Party, and changing the composition of the Corporation, will allow us to defeat Service Charges.

While it's true that such a focus may prove upsetting to Fianna Fail as the elections draw closer, this strategy is strictly limited in its usefulness.

In the first place, it rests on the notion that by electing more councillors who will vote against Service Charges we can deal this unjust tax a death blow.

The problem is that it can't and won't. If the Corporation voted against the charges it would be removed from office by the Fianna Fail government.

In a nutshell, the power to beat these charges does not lie with councillors in City Hall, vocal and articulate as some of them may be.

Rather the power to beat the charges lies in the local communities—mass non-payment—and with local government workers who have the capacity to frustrate the collection of charges completely.

A campaign that wants to win should look to where we have the capacity and potential to do so.

This entails building a strong campaign that can act as a focus for public anger and which attempts to mobilise as many people—in the workplaces and in the community—against these taxes.

Such a campaign has the potential to make the Service Charges history.



Socialist Worker
PUBLIC MEETING
The Revolutionary Road to Socialism

Wednesday May 22nd
8.00pm
The Grand Circle,
Emmet Place, Cork

Join Us!

This bulletin was produced by the Socialist Workers Movement. The SWM stands for a fight against Fianna Fail and their rich backers.

We are a growing organisation, attempting to build an alternative to the "market socialists" of Labour and the Workers Party.

We urge you to join us in building such an alternative.

For details of meetings and activities around the country, please fill in this slip and return to SWM, PO Box 1648, James's Street, Dublin 8.

Name.....

Address.....

Phone.....